



# **Enhancing Alberta's adult learning system through technology**

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**Policy, guidelines and procedures  
for the Learning Enhancement Envelope**

JUNE 1996

**Alberta**

ADVANCED EDUCATION AND  
CAREER DEVELOPMENT



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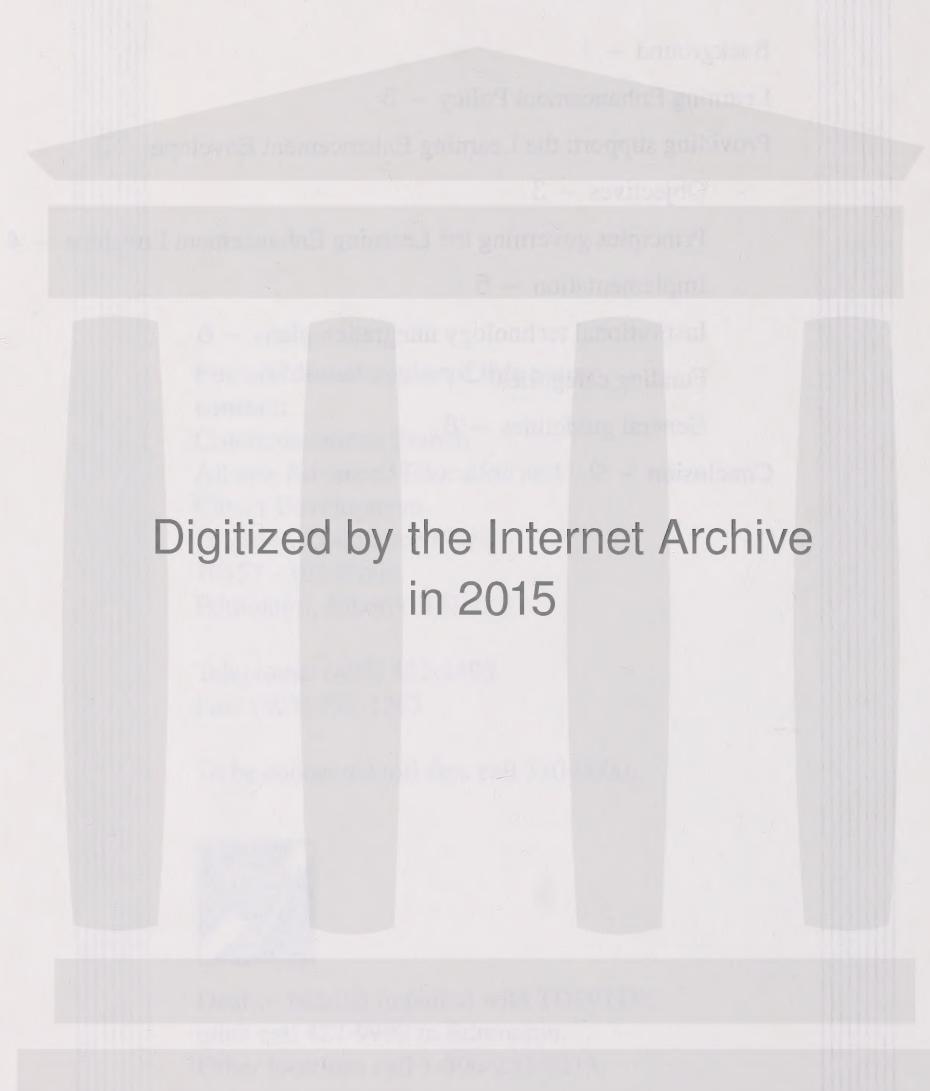
## Background

In October 2008, after extensive consultation with staff and students, the University of Alberta launched its first ever Learning Enhancement Policy. The policy addresses the need to enhance teaching, learning and the student experience by creating opportunities for students to learn more effectively and benefit from their studies.

In September 2009, the University of Alberta released its second policy paper for students, which is referred to as the Learning Enhancement Envelope. This second paper builds upon the principles outlined in the Learning Enhancement Policy to offer increased support for students in their academic places of choice. It provides the institutional framework for the delivery of support services to students, and emphasizes the key role of faculty and staff in supporting students and enhancing the study experience. The Learning Envelope is intended to support services and programs that promote their academic goals. When complete and effective, institutions that open the door to diversity and flexibility, and allow students to develop their strengths in full and just time, will succeed.

In this paper, institutions expand their individual roles to become collaborative entities of experts sharing their knowledge with each other.

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# Enhancing Alberta's adult learning system through technology

## Policy, guidelines and procedures for the Learning Enhancement Envelope

**W**orking together, Alberta's post-secondary institutions and Advanced Education and Career Development can enhance the province's adult learning system by using communications and information technologies. A total of \$30 million over three years will be directed at the integration of technology into the system to support, expand, and improve the ways learners, teachers and curriculum interact. Enhancing Alberta's learning system through technology will benefit both students and the institutions that serve them.

## Background

In October 1994, after extensive discussion with Albertans about the future of adult learning in the province, the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development released *New Directions for Adult Learning in Alberta*. The policy paper identified goals and outlined strategies for our adult learning system. One of the strategies was to expand the use of learning technology and alternate forms of delivery to create more learning opportunities.

In September 1995, the department released *A Vision for Change: a concept paper for the development of a virtual learning system*. The paper described a vision in which the adult learning system is transformed by the use of technology to serve learners in ways, times and places suited to their needs. It presented the concept of a "virtual" system for learning. A virtual learning system reduces the barriers of time and place by linking teachers, students and curriculum through technology. Technology also helps in providing the support services students need to achieve their learning goals. Multi-media and interactive communications open the doors to discovery and life-long learning, whether students are on or off campus, in full or part time attendance.

In this vision, institutions expand their individual roles to become collaborative members of networks, sharing their knowledge with each other

and learners. Learning materials are focused on outcomes. Student evaluation is an integral part of the learning material which provides prompt feedback and remediation. Educators retain their authority for determining the standards required for diplomas and degrees but they are more concerned with organizing, mentoring and designing learning experiences than with direct instruction. They function as leaders, facilitators and members of instructional design teams. In a virtual learning system, technology is a tool that helps to improve the ways learners, teachers and curriculum interact.

The *Vision for Change* paper stimulated much discussion and the department received comments on it from stakeholders within the adult learning system and from other government departments. At the same time, the department gathered information about developments taking place outside of Alberta and the work of leading authorities on learning and technology throughout North America.

After considering the information and advice received, the department reached the following conclusions:

- Advanced Education and Career Development should provide leadership by supporting efforts to integrate technology with the adult learning system and by encouraging partnerships for the development of alternative models of learning and the design of new learning and support networks.
- The department should test the extent to which technology can improve learning and reduce costs by funding and closely monitoring plans and initiatives designed to meet those objectives.
- Technology integration needs to be considered in a context that deals with how technology affects learners, faculty, curriculum, support services and the roles of institutions.
- Alberta educators have valuable experience and expertise in the use of technology and in community-based learning. Future developments should build on these strengths.
- Reduction of the barriers of time and place implies a new order of cooperation and collaboration among institutions.
- Technology integration can best be achieved by institutional and inter-institutional planning which serves to transform institutional practices, to determine how initiatives fit within the context of current and future activities, and to determine the most appropriate uses of technology.

## **Learning Enhancement Policy**

Advanced Education and Career Development will support and encourage the integration of information and telecommunications technologies within Alberta's adult learning system when opportunities for learners are expanded, high quality is assured and productivity can be improved.

### **Providing support: the Learning Enhancement Envelope**

Advanced Education and Career Development will support technology integration within the adult learning system through the establishment of a special funding "envelope". An envelope is a way to designate funding for a specific purpose. The Learning Enhancement Envelope will stimulate use of the most current concepts in learning and technology to develop alternatives that provide new and better opportunities for adult learners at costs that can be justified to Alberta taxpayers.

The Learning Enhancement Envelope will provide a total of \$30 million over three years for technology integration: \$10 million for each year, beginning with the current (1996-97) fiscal year.

Public post-secondary institutions and institutions whose programs are accredited by the Private Colleges Accreditation Board are eligible for funding through this envelope. Initiatives receiving funding will pertain to adult development programs, including academic upgrading, certificate, diploma, degree and apprenticeship programs as well as the students, staff and instructors working in or providing support to these programs. Organizations such as community consortia, adult learning centres, employers and others are encouraged to work with eligible institutions in identifying and developing initiatives that meet the objectives of this envelope.

### **Objectives**

The Learning Enhancement Envelope has been established to simultaneously achieve three objectives:

- to expand opportunity;
- to improve learning; and
- to increase productivity.

Technology and telecommunications will be the tools for accomplishing the three objectives in combination. The purpose is not simply to add technology to what is already being done. It is to use technology to provide alternate methods to the traditional delivery of learning opportunities and to provide related learner support services.

*Expand opportunity* There are two aspects to this objective. One is to develop alternate ways for students to access and use learning materials, whether they are on or off campus. These opportunities will create for students choices between traditional and non-traditional models of learning. The development of new models of learning will be funded if they provide effective alternatives to traditional methods.

The other aspect of the objective is to increase efforts in distance education to meet the needs of learners who cannot attend campus-based programs. The Learning Enhancement Envelope will fund the conversion of curriculum into formats that are suitable for distance delivery, the development and assessment of models of support services for students learning at a distance, and the purchase of equipment.

*Improve learning* Educational technology can facilitate the teaching and learning process, making education a richer and more stimulating experience and spurring improved intellectual performance. The Learning Enhancement Envelope will support efforts that use technology to exploit strategies for improved learning, whether these efforts affect learner experiences in traditional classrooms or replace traditional practices.

*Increase productivity* The use of technology in teaching and learning has the potential to produce gains in productivity. Improved productivity can mean that more can be done with the same or less amount of money or effort. It can also mean that pass rates in courses increase, completion rates in programs increase, or learning time decreases. Using technology to improve productivity requires the replacement by technology of some activities now being performed by faculty and support personnel. Intelligent substitution will require investments of time and energy to examine the way things are currently being done, with an openness to doing things differently. The Learning Enhancement Envelope will support efforts at improving productivity through initiatives that test new technologically based learning models using student achievement and cost as measures of success. The department recognizes that some productivity gains might not be seen immediately and can be achieved only in the longer term.

## **Principles governing the Learning Enhancement Envelope**

1. The *goals* of the adult learning system – accessibility, responsiveness, research excellence, affordability and accountability – will drive the development and implementation of a virtual learning system.
2. The funding envelope will support the use of technology to develop a *system-wide* virtual learning environment.

Learners are not only clients of an individual institution, they are clients of Alberta's adult learning system. The development of a virtual learning

system is meant to benefit all adult learners in the province.

3. The process is *developmental* rather than competitive.

Every institution will benefit from the Learning Enhancement Envelope. The department will invest in technology integration at all eligible institutions to ensure that they all advance in the use of technology. Some institutions may receive funding to provide services at other institutions.

Although institutions are in different stages of readiness for technology integration, over the three year duration of the funding envelope, all institutions will develop expertise in technology integration.

4. The process is intended to be *transformational*, focusing on how institutions can collaboratively use technology to achieve the objectives of the funding envelope.

5. The process will be *open*.

The department will provide timely information to institutions about the progress and developments of the Learning Enhancement Envelope through regular status reports. Abstracts of institutional technology integration plans and funded initiatives will be released. In addition, detailed information about institutional plans for technology integration will be provided when agreement to do so is obtained from the institutions.

## Implementation

Technology integration plans, developed by each institution, will play an integral part in the allocation of the Learning Enhancement Envelope. The department's expectations for these plans are outlined in the next section.

For the initial year of the envelope's operation (1996-97) grants are being made available to institutions in two ways:

1. \$5 million will be divided among all eligible institutions on the basis of 1994-95 full time equivalent enrolments. Although prior approval is not required for the expenditure of these funds, initiatives supported by these grants must be included in each institution's technology integration plan and be consistent with the policy, objectives and guidelines of the funding envelope. Each institution will be asked to provide the department with an accounting of these funds.
2. Each institution is eligible to apply for further funding in 1996-97 in support of its technology integration plan. A total of \$5 million is available. Requests for these funds must be made as specific initiatives within the technology integration plan. The approval of additional funds will be made by the Minister on the basis of the plan and the

potential impact of the initiatives on system priorities. Details will be announced as they become available.

Technology integration plans with funding requests for 1996-97 should be submitted to Advanced Education and Career Development by November 30, 1996. Institutions are encouraged to submit plans as soon as possible.

Funding from the Learning Enhancement Envelope for the following two years will be based on the institutions' technology integration plans.

## Institutional technology integration plans

Technology integration will be achieved when institutional and inter-institutional planning form the basis for initiatives directed at the transformation of institutional practices. Each institution is expected to develop a technology integration plan in conjunction with its Learning Enhancement Envelope initiatives.

The department will review technology integration plans, not for the purpose of formal approval, but rather as the basis of consultation among the department, the institutions and other stakeholders in the adult learning system. Technology integration plans will be assigned to review teams comprised of members of a Ministerial Advisory Committee and department staff who will initiate dialogue with the institutions. Technical reviewers will be consulted when necessary.

The department understands that planning for the integration of technology is complex and that plans will need to be updated as initiatives are developed. It is expected that plans will be the outcome of a continuing process of review and revision. Updated plans may be submitted at any time but the department will require a current technology integration plan from each institution each year during the existence of the Learning Enhancement Envelope.

Technology integration plans prepared in 1996-97 should include the following:

- an outline of how the plan relates to *A Vision for Change: a concept paper for the development of a virtual learning system*;
- a summary of the work pertaining to technology integration that has already been done by the institution, including a description of accomplishments, faculty expertise and related equipment holdings;
- an outline of the steps the institution intends to take over a period of three to five years in the area of technology integration including those activities the institution will initiate using its own funding sources;

- a description of the initiatives undertaken or being planned using the initial Learning Enhancement Envelope grant;
- a description of how initiatives being submitted for funding fit with what the institution has already done and plans to do over the next few years;
- an indication of how the initiative and priorities described in the plan relate to the goals, principles and funding categories of the Learning Enhancement Envelope;
- measures by which performance and outcomes of initiatives can be judged.

## Funding categories

Grants from the Learning Enhancement Envelope may be used to accomplish the following activities. Expenditures on an initiative may include any combination of these categories.

- i) *Adapt curriculum for new, technologically supported models of learning for students who may be on a campus, at a community site, at home or at a workplace, and test these models.*

Curriculum may be for an entire program, a course or part of a course. Initiatives should have the potential to improve learning and to be delivered for total less cost to the system with no loss in quality when compared with delivery by traditional means. New curriculum should be usable in other programs and contribute to system efficiency by reducing duplication of effort in the adult learning system. Funds are available for the revision of existing materials, development of new materials and/or the purchase of learning materials from outside Alberta.
- ii) *Increase the number of courses and programs that are available to students who need access to opportunities from a distance.*

Initiatives should contribute to making a complete program of studies available by distance delivery and should rely on existing technology or technology that is available at reasonable cost.
- iii) *Design training that will help students, support staff and instructors to acquire the skills necessary to study and work in settings that integrate technology with learning.*

Initiatives should contribute to a permanent capability for training and use technology in the training model.
- iv) *Conduct research that will add to knowledge about the integration of technology with teaching and learning.*

Research should contribute knowledge which could have general

application to the adult learning system within any of the dimensions of this envelope.

- v) *Devise and test models of learner support that will be required to successfully integrate technology with learning.*

Once developed, these learner supports should be able to be sustained by resources currently available to the system.

- vi) *Purchase equipment and infrastructure that are required to increase access or to deliver curriculum using technology.*

New equipment and infrastructure will be provided only when existing equipment or infrastructure are unavailable or inadequate for the delivery of curriculum or support services that are consistent with the objectives of this envelope. The potential of equipment should be fully exploited and networks should be able to expand to include additional partners and connect to other networks.

## General guidelines

1. Technology integration plans and requests for funding are to be submitted to the department through the office of the president of the respective institution.
2. Funding through this envelope will be term certain. Ongoing financial requirements should be met by other sources and plans for ongoing funding should be described in the technology integration plan, when appropriate.
3. Priority will be given to initiatives that demonstrate collaboration among institutions and other organizations. Two or more institutions may jointly submit plans and funding requests but each institution is expected to submit its own technology integration plan.
4. Institutions and their partners in initiatives will be expected to contribute financially. All grants will be made as a portion of the total costs of any initiative.
5. Grants will be based on the additional costs of any initiatives. Overhead costs may be included in a budget and may make up part of an institution's financial contribution but they will not be funded.
6. Development of new programs of study is not eligible for funding through this envelope but funds may be used to develop materials for courses that are a part of a new program funded by other sources.
7. Curriculum and other materials produced by funding from this envelope must be made available to the Alberta adult learning system at the cost of reproducing these materials.



## Conclusion

The Learning Enhancement Envelope will advance the development of a province-wide virtual learning system to serve adult learners in ways, times and places suited to their needs. The development of such a system will bring about a new order of cooperation among post-secondary institutions, as they become collaborative members of technology-enhanced learning networks.





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